

Red-flagging of Western Ghats by IUCN

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Why in News?

The Western Ghats and 2 national parks in India have been categorized as being of “significant concern” in the IUCN list of natural World Heritage sites across Asia.

World Heritage Outlook 4 report

- The Outlook is a global assessment of **natural (and mixed) UNESCO World Heritage Sites**; this edition covers 271 sites.
- **4th edition Launched in** - IUCN World Conservation Congress 2025 (Abu Dhabi).
- **Released by** - The IUCN.
- It complements the official monitoring under the World Heritage Convention, providing deeper analysis on threats, protection/management status, and trends.
- **Categories** - The report categorizes the natural sites as “good”, “good with some concerns”, “significant concern”, and “critical”.

Natural World Heritage sites make up less than 1% of the Earth’s surface, but nurture more than 20% of mapped global species richness.

Key Insights

- **Identified 2 national parks** - **Assam’s Manas national park and West Bengal’s Sundarbans national park.**
- **Good with some concerns sites in India** -
 - The Great Himalayan National Park Conservation Area,
 - Kaziranga National Park,
 - Keoladeo National Park, and

- Nanda Devi and Valley of Flowers National Parks.
- **4 biggest threats** - Attributed to the loss of habitats and species in South Asia were climate change, tourism activities, invasive alien species, and roads.
 - **Climate change** - It is the single greatest threat, affecting 43% of natural sites.
 - **Invasive alien species** - Affecting 30% of sites, and a sharp increase in risks from wildlife and plant diseases.



- **Other threats** - Forest fires, hunting, roadkill, waste disposal, encroachment, illegal logging, road construction
- **Percentage of positive conservation** - The report points out that percentage of sites with a positive conservation outlook has, for the first time, decreased significantly.
- Sites assessed since 2014, some 63% of sites had a positive outlook in 2014, 2017 and 2020, however, in 2025 only 57% of these sites have a positive conservation outlook.
- **Reason for the Vulnerability - Hydropower projects** - The Western Ghats are highly endangered by hundreds of hydropower projects like Sillahalla Pumped Storage Hydroelectric project in the Nilgiris.

Sillahalla Pumped Storage Hydroelectric project involves

constructing dams across River Sillahalla and River Kundah, with an aim to generate 1,000 MW of power for Tamil Nadu's plains.

- **Tourism** – It is creating problems of garbage, often consumed by wild animals such as elephants and exacerbating conflict. Plantations are replacing natural ecosystems.
- **Climate change** – It has forced fauna to adapt by redistributing themselves from fast-warming lower altitudes to higher reaches, such as the *Nilgiri flycatcher* and the *black and orange flycatcher*.
- **Exotic species** – These are colonising natural forests, such as eucalyptus and acacia (both originally from Australia).
- **Salinity and Heavy metal contamination** – In Sundarbans mangroves, salinity, heavy metal contamination, and unsustainable resource extraction threatens the ecosystem.
- Sea level rise, frequent storm surges reduce mangrove biodiversity.

Reference

[The Hindu | IUCN red-flagged the Western Ghats](#)